

Bible Study

Why Good People Fail at Prayer

I. Introduction:

I think I know why God has given me eternal life. It's because I'm such a slow learner.

II. Almost Everything in My Life about Prayer Has Changed Even Over the Past Year ...and I'm Probably Not Done Yet.

A. The Foundations

1. The Sistine Chapel (The Catholic Dilemma) & Early Years as a Protestant

a) Throughout most of my life, I would have defined prayer as talking with God. And in the beginning we talked a lot. Because we were taught that our sins always separated us from God, we were taught to approach God like a teenager wanting to borrow the car but needing his parent's signature on a bad report card.

In the Catholic church, we were always either failing or in imminent danger of failing. We approached God in imagined sack cloth and ashes, proclaiming our unworthiness. We preceded our prayers with a request that God forgive all of the sins we committed since the last time we asked, and then we verbally laid out our petitions. Longer prayers helped. So did fasting, candles, recitations of the rosary, financial offerings and asking deceased saints to intervene on our behalf. The fundamental emotion was reverential awe, fear, and uncertainty.

When I was born again in a Bible Church, some but not all things changed. Because we dedicated ourselves to Biblical principles, we set aside the rosaries, the candles and the intervention of dead saints. But because we didn't understand the Biblical doctrine of righteousness, because we didn't see ourselves as cloaked in God's own divine righteousness, we still approached God as sinners, conscious of our unworthiness and maneuvering as best we could to enter into a reverent posture of heart and mind in hopes of securing a favorable outcome. In that maneuvering, longer prayers especially in groups, financial gifts and fasting still held value.

B. The New Foundation

- 1. God has not only forgiven all of our sin; He has freed us from the power of sin and clothed us in His own divine righteousness.**

Heb. 5:12-13 — For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the [b]oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

Heb. 10:14 — For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Heb. 10:16-18 — “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

Rom. 6:2 — How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Rom. 6:10 — For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

- 2. God has legally adopted us into His own divine family. Through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son, God, as our Father, has received us. As our Father, He has provided us with an inheritance which includes eternal life in one-ness with Him.**

John 20:16-17 — Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ”

Acts 26:17-18 — I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

Eph. 1:11 — In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

- 3. God’s purpose for us — and therefore our purpose as well — is for us to be conformed to His image that we would be a suitable companion, a bride**

to live with and rule beside His Son.

Gen. 1:26 — 26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

C. The New Structure

1. We don't appeal any more for the intervention of dead saints; we are the saints, so that, by His grace toward us, we may boldly approach His throne for those things which serve His greater purpose.

Rom. 1:1 — To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph. 2:19 — Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

2. We don't ask for His forgiveness; we praise God for the forgiveness which He already extended to us, bought for us at the price of His Son's crucifixion. For us as saints, it is not our unworthiness that takes us to our knees; it's His glory and goodness toward us.

Rev. 1:17 — And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

1 John 4:18 — There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

3. On that foundation of His divine and certain forgiveness, we forgive any others who have offended or sinned against us, thereby aligning ourselves with His character and purpose.

James 5:16 — Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Matt. 18:32-35 — Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Matt. 6:14-15 — For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither

will your Father forgive your trespasses.

4. We rest in prayer. We rest in forgiveness. We rest in His boundless love and confidence. We rest in His grace. We rest in His unchangable promises.

Heb. 4:9 — There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. 10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

5. We listen, recognizing that prayer is a two-way street and that His way is far more important than ours.

Heb. 3:7-8 — Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness....”

D. The Content

Cleansing — Ask the Holy Spirit to wash away the distractions of the day.

Oneness — Ask the Spirit to lead you into the throne room, to take you into that place of one-ness with God

Listening — Listen to what God speaks to you.

Asking — Set your needs before Him, and record them for yourself by writing them down.

Thanksgiving — Thank and praise Him for His goodness and faithfulness.